

40 CHARGES

Zahid's graft trial on Foreign Visa System to start May 24

SHAH ALAM: The corruption trial of former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who is facing 40 charges over the Foreign Visa System (VLN), will start on May 24 at the High Court here.

Earlier, the hearing, which was set for April 24, was postponed following the implementation of the Conditional Movement Control Order and was moved to May until June as a result of a change in the High Court judge.

High Court judge Datuk Mohd Yazid Mustafa said the new dates agreeable with all parties were May 24, 25 and 27, June 1 to 3, 14 to 18 and 21 to 25.

Deputy public prosecutor Datuk Raja Rozela Raja Toran yesterday said 15 witnesses would be called to testify in the trial.

"We have agreed with the new dates as the judge was changed from Justice Datuk Noorin Badaruddin to Justice Datuk Mohd Yazid Mustafa. Considering all have agreed with the new dates, the trial is expected to go on without postponement. We will prepare comprehensive witness statements as required by the court."

Zahid, 68, who is also Umno president, was not present in court and was represented by his counsel, Hamidi Mohd Noh.

He pleaded not guilty to 33 charges of receiving bribes amounting to S\$13.56 million from Ultra Kirana Sdn Bhd as an inducement for himself in his capacity as a civil servant then as

home minister to extend the contract of the company as the operator of One-Stop Centre in China and the VLN system, as well as to maintain an agreement with the company to supply VLN integrated system paraphernalia.

He allegedly committed the offences at Seri Satria, Precinct 16, Putrajaya, and Country Heights, Kajang, between October 2014 and March 2018.

The charges, framed under Section 16 (a)(B) of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) Act 2009 and punishable under Section 24(1) of the same act, provides a maximum jail sentence of 20 years and a fine of not less than five times of the value of the gratification, or RM10,000, whichever is higher, upon conviction.

He also pleaded not guilty to 33 alternative charges under Section 165 of the Penal Code, where he was charged, as home minister, with receiving bribes amounting to S\$13.56 million in relation to the VLN system between 2014 to 2017.

For another seven charges, he was charged, as home minister, with accepting S\$1.15 million, RM3 million, €15,000 and US\$15,000 in cash from the same company.

He was charged with committing the offences at his residence in Country Heights between June 2015 and October 2017. The charges, under Section 165 of the Penal Code, carries a maximum jail term of two years or a fine, or both, if found guilty. **Bernama**